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AUTHOR Purohit, Sally R.
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ABSTRACT

Four major questions are addressed in this assessment of citizen involvement in planning and decision making on use of natural resources: 1) What citizen participation techniques have been utilized by state recreation planners? 2) What are the dominant goals of public participation in natural resource decision making? 3) How do state recreation planners feel about citizen participation and what problems have they encountered? and, 4) At what stages in a basic planning cycle is citizen input considered most valuable? (Author/JD)

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AN ASSESSMENT OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN NATURAL RESOURCE PLANNING AND DECISION-MAKING

by

Sally R. Purohit*

In recent years, demands for greater citizen involvement in administrative decision-making have escalated due to concerns over public accountability, the failure of previous public programs to meet genuine public needs, and the desire of individuals to participate more directly in decisions which affect them (Sewell and O'Riordan, 1976). This increased pressure of public participation in policy-making has resulted in renewed efforts at soliciting and incorporating citizen input into decision-making at all government levels, especially the federal level.

An example of this new emphasis on citizen involvement at the federal level is reflected in the current policy of the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service, an agency charged with dissemination of Federal Land and Water Conservation Funds. These federal funds are administered at the state level to acquire land and develop recreational facilities. State planners are required to maintain and update a comprehensive outdoor recreation plan in order to qualify for the federal funds. This study focuses on citizen participation within the context of natural resource decision-making through an examination of public participation used in the state recreation planning process.

This study addresses four major objectives. They include: (1) what citizen participation techniques have been utilized by state recreation planners in the past five years and how were they used? (2) what are the dominant objectives of public participation at this level of natural resource decision-making? (3) how do state recreation planners feel about citizen participation in general and what problems have they encountered in their programs? (4) at what stages in a basic planning cycle is citizen input considered most valuable? Several explanatory variables were also used in this study, such as region, due date of the next state recreation plan, job status, sex, education and age.

Citizen Participation and Natural Resource Decision-Making

Several authors have tried to clarify and structure the citizen involvement process (Wengert, 1976; Rosenbaum, 1978; Voth and Bonner, 1978). The sharing or redistribution of influence or power is a central theme in these classifications. Studies of citizen participation may be grouped into four basic types: (1) case studies of projects or issues, (2) analyses of citizens who participate, (3) studies of the perspectives of administrative decision-makers, and (4) techniques of citizen participation (Potter, 1978). For the purposes of this paper, the most relevant studies are those which report on citizen participation techniques (particularly evaluation), and those which analyze agency staff strategies and objectives. Case studies offer some interest because they sometimes evaluate specific citizen participation techniques and examine the relationship between administrative staff and involved citizen.

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*Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology, Auburn University, Auburn, Alabama.

Evaluation of Citizen Participation Programs

A wide variety of citizen participation techniques has been developed in recent years (Rosener, 1975; Lind, 1975; Voth and Bonner, 1977). While there is a large volume of materials relating to citizen participation techniques, there are not many studies which focus on the effectiveness of participation. As Rosener (1978) points out, there is no reason to assume that more participation will necessarily result in better policy. Thus, it is important to evaluate the different types of programs.

Much of the work that has been done in evaluation of citizen participation programs or techniques in natural resource decision-making originates in Canada. A recent article by Sewell and Phillips (1978) examines the evaluation models of four authors and 22 case studies. They conclude that there is no generally accepted evaluation model and all frameworks suffer from some serious deficiencies. They discovered that there is a high degree of variability concerning the perceived goals of public participation, evaluation criteria, and evaluative conclusions depending on whether agency personnel, citizen group representatives, or independent observers conducted the evaluation.

Types of citizen participation program evaluation criteria include: benefits derived from participation, extent of representation of various publics, resources available to the program, attitude of the agency toward the program, amount of technical assistance available to educate the citizens, and adequate planning for the program. Ideally citizen participation programs must be integrated into the planning process, be given adequate time to develop, and utilize appropriate techniques (Voth and Bonner, 1978). Sewell and Phillips (1979) found that independent evaluators emphasized the extent to which a citizen participation program fulfilled its objectives, the degree of representation, and the accuracy of the information gathered as evaluation criteria. Our study attempted to use several of the criteria suggested by other authors as dimensions for evaluation of citizen participation techniques used in state outdoor recreation planning.

Strategies and Objectives of Administrative Citizen Participation

There have been several typologies of administrative citizen participation strategies developed. For instance, Fox (1971) has delineated four strategies: decentralization, engineered consent, therapy, and equal protection. Others who have developed similar typologies are: Arnstein (1969) who elaborated a ladder of citizen participation based on degree of citizen power; Burke (1968) who identified five citizen involvement strategies; and Wengert (1976) who classified perceptions of public participation.

There are also several typologies of objectives which are usually more program specific than strategies or goals. Doerksen and Pierce (1975) identify three major goals or themes which characterize citizen participation strategies: self-fulfilling goals, symbolic goals, or instrumental goals. Similarly, Voth and Bonner (1978) have isolated the following objectives of citizen participation: (1) sharing power with citizens, (2) influencing citizen attitudes, (3) mobilizing the resources of the citizenry, (4) gaining credibility for programs, (5) reducing conflict, and (6) determining citizen preferences. Sewell and Phillips (1979) also identify three objectives of public

participation programs which must be weighed against each other: a high degree of citizen involvement, a high degree of representation or equity, and high efficiency (time, cost) for the agency. These objectives represent trade-offs in that all three cannot be simultaneously pursued to the same extent.

Characteristics of Administrative Citizen Participation

In addition to goals, typologies and objectives, the relationship between citizens and bureaucrats which is characteristic of administrative citizen participation has been elaborated (Voth and Bonner, 1978). One characteristic is ambiguity of authority. This refers to the blurring of responsibility that occurs when government officials share decision-making with citizen groups. Redundancy of functions is another characteristic which concerns the duplication which frequently occurs between governmental entities.

The third characteristic is the development of a special relationship between citizens and bureaucracy. Administrators typically have the discretion to identify affected constituencies, and stimulate their involvement. This may reduce apathy and gain support for specific programs or it may lead to certain vested interests gaining public power and control. When citizen participation is mandated for a government agency, that agency also assumes authority for setting the guidelines for that participation. The fourth characteristic is the assumption of constitutional controls by the bureaucracy. The agency may determine who is a citizen, develop selection procedures, and even select the representatives.

Research Methods

Data Collection

A survey of state recreation planners was conducted by means of a mail questionnaire in June, 1979. Each of the 50 states and Washington, D. C., were contacted individually. Lists of state recreation planners were obtained with the help of the federal agency, Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service, and by reference to the National Wildlife Federation's Conservation Directory (1979). The cover letter requested that the questionnaire be completed by the planner who was most knowledgeable about public participation in the state recreation planning process. Dillman's method for mail surveys (1978) was used as a general model for this study. The final response rate was 96%, providing data from 48 states and one district.

Measurement and Analysis

The survey instrument was designed especially for use in examining citizen participation in state recreation planning. Six of the most widely used citizen participation techniques were employed as the basis for formulating questions about actual use of specific techniques. These techniques (the workshop, attitude survey, public hearing, interviews with knowledgeables [key persons], advisory groups, and public information programs) were gleaned from a study of the public participation literature (Purohit, 1979). If planners had used any of these techniques, they were asked to evaluate the level and type of participation, representation, effect on policy, and information gained.

While there are many other evaluative criteria that could be used, the categories suggested (Voth and Bonner, 1978) were employed as fundamental dimensions for evaluating citizen participation techniques.

Efforts were also made to identify the relative importance of various objectives used in the recreation planning process. Items were developed for the six objectives derived from Voth and Bonner (1978), and an additional objective emerged from the pretest of the survey instrument. In addition, the characteristics of administrative citizen participation (Voth and Bonner, 1978) were utilized as the basis for item development in an effort to examine the attitudes of recreation planners toward public participation.

Additional information obtained through the questionnaire included an open-ended question on the problems and limitations of citizen participation and a question which was designed to discover how feedback from citizens is transformed into input to the planning process. A circular representation of the stages of a planning process was adapted from a cycle assembled by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service (1978). Recreation planners were asked to indicate at what points in the circle they received the most valuable input from citizens.

Explanatory variables which were utilized included: the due date of the next state recreation plan, region, job title, years in job, sex, education and age. As a variable, region was interpreted as the subdivisions of the country under different regional offices of the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service. It was hypothesized that different district emphases might be reflected in state programs and attitudes. The state recreation plan due date was also utilized because new federal guidelines have resulted in changing citizen participation approaches. It was also hypothesized that differences might emerge between recreation planners and supervisory recreation planners.

In addition to percentage distributions of responses, a test of difference between means was used to examine regional differences, differences between job statuses, and differences in the due date of the next state recreation plan in relation to: (a) the number of times a specific public participation technique was used in the last five years, (b) attitudes toward administrative citizen participation, and (c) objectives of public participation. One-way analysis of variance was also utilized to examine regional, job status and state recreation plan date differences for use of techniques and attitudes toward public participation. In general the use of analysis of variance and tests of difference between means did not yield significant results.

Results

Evaluation of Citizen Participation Techniques

In Table 1, the median frequencies of use of a citizen participation technique show that the public hearing was the most commonly used technique, followed by key interviews, public information programs and advisory committees. Since a citizen survey is a costly and time-consuming technique, it should be expected that there would be fewer occurrences of this technique. These results should be cautiously interpreted because: (a) many recreation planners have not been in the same position for those five years, and (b) there appeared to be

Table 1. The Use of Selected Citizen Participation Techniques by State Recreation Planners

Dimensions	Percentages					
	Public Hearing	Survey	Key Interviews	Advisory Committees	Workshop	Public Information
Median Frequency (last 5 years)	9.6	2.2	5.8	5.1	4.2	5.3
Level and Type of Participation						
> 100, active	19.4	77.5	16.7	16.2	45.7	NA
< 100, active	27.8	2.5	58.3	75.7	42.9	
> 100, limited	11.1	20.0	8.3	2.7	5.7	
< 100, limited	41.7	0	16.7	5.4	5.7	
Representation						
cross-section	37.8	82.9	8.3	26.3	5.6	81.3
leaders	13.5	2.4	55.6	36.8	22.2	0
specialized groups	27.0	0	16.7	28.9	41.7	9.4
other	21.6	14.6	19.4	7.9	30.6	9.4
Effect on Policy						
one of several factors in setting policy	70.3	78.0	80.6	73.7	72.2	NA
basis for policy	10.8	14.6	16.7	23.7	11.1	
no effect on policy	10.8	4.9	2.8	2.6	5.6	
other	8.1	2.4	0	0	11.1	
Information Gained						
determine supply	11.1	14.9	15.5	11.4	6.8	10.9
assess demand	16.7	36.6	15.5	15.9	16.2	10.9
identify problems	37.5	31.7	40.5	37.5	48.6	32.6
approve or reject aspect	30.6	16.8	28.6	34.1	28.4	19.6
none	4.2	0	0	1.1	0	26.1

differences in perception of what constituted a single occurrence of a technique.

Other criteria which were used in this analysis included participation, representation, effect on policy, and types of information gained. Recreation planners were asked about the number of people involved and whether the extent of activity was active or limited. Generally, the public hearing involved less than 100 persons, with limited participation and to a lesser extent, active participation. The survey almost always involved over 100 persons, and was usually considered active participation. Both key interviews and advisory committees typically included less than 100 persons with active participation. Workshops included both large and small numbers of participants, and the participation was perceived as active.

Representation was designed to discover what segments of the population were reached by each technique. Surveys were most often used to obtain a cross-section of opinion, and key interviews were designed to interview leaders. Public information programs reached a broad cross-section. The most commonly utilized methods of disseminating public information were brochures, newsletters and other types of publications. Letters and exhibits were also used.

There is more diversity in the audience reached with the public hearing, advisory committees and workshops. There are certain tendencies which emerge, however; about 40% of the states reached specialized groups with the workshop, reached a cross-section with public hearings, and reached leaders with advisory committees.

Generally, input from each technique was used by the states as one of several factors in setting policy, and was usually not ignored in setting policy. A few states did use the information derived from a technique as the basis for policy (advisory committees in particular).

Several kinds of information were gained from the use of each technique. Overall, the techniques were most useful in identifying problems. The survey was also frequently used to assess demand. For all techniques except the survey, at least half of the respondents gained information which was used to approve or reject aspects of policy. Generally, the techniques were only occasionally used to determine supply, although the survey and key interviews were used for that purpose more often than other techniques.

Problems in the Use of Citizen Participation

An analysis of the responses to an open-ended question about the problems and limitations on the use of citizen participation revealed that a majority of the state planners mentioned either time or cost constraints. The major problem was time (29%) and the second most important problem was costs (21%). In order of their ranking, other problems which were mentioned by several states were: generating and sustaining public interest (15%) and obtaining input which is representative and includes the average citizen (12%). Other problems were isolated, such as problems with specific techniques and the lack of staff resources. Discrepancies between citizen participation methods and objectives and problems with the domination of special interest groups were also enumerated.

Many of the recreation planners included additional information about their citizen participation prgrams, and one conclusion that could

be drawn from a comparison of many states is that there seemed to be a wide variety of approaches and programs. The types of programs were partially dependent on state characteristics, such as a small and dispersed population (North Dakota) versus a large and concentrated population (California). Also, some of the planners perceived a need to maintain an awareness of the values and attitudes of the citizens of their state.

Stages of Recreation Planning

The circular representation of planning stages in which citizen input may be obtained contained eight steps: generation of ideas and problems, assessment of supply, determination of demand, identification of needs, policy options, policy plan, approval of policy plan, and implementation. The two stages of state recreation planning which emerged as important sources of input were: (1) the generation of ideas and problems; and (2) the identification of needs. The least utilized stages of input were policy plan and implementation. Responses were well distributed among the different stages, but generally input was utilized in the initial stages of identifying needs, problems and demand rather than in the latter stages of setting and implementing policy.

Objectives of Citizen Participation

In Table 2, the percentages of states that ranked an objective as first, second or third choice and cumulative percentages for rankings of each objective are listed. A wide majority of respondents selected determining citizen preferences (84%) and educating citizens about programs and processes (83%) among their top three rankings. Two other objectives emerged as next in importance: 61% of state recreation planners ranked "utilize human resources of citizens," and 60% rated "gain support for programs" as high priority objectives. Thirty-eight percent of the states considered the objective of reducing conflict as important, and 35 percent listed fulfilling legal requirements among their top three choices.

Attitudes Toward Characteristics of Citizen Participation

Attitudes of recreation planners toward characteristics of administrative citizen participation were examined. The four characteristics unique to administrative citizen participation developed by Voth and Bonner (1978) were empirically employed. Support was found among this group of state recreation planners for three of the four characteristics, as measured in this study: ambiguity of authority, the development of a special relationship between decision-makers and citizens, and the delegation of constitutional controls to agencies. Planners did not perceive redundancy of function between themselves and citizens. Planners felt that they have the right to develop selection procedures to determine which citizens to involve in the public participation process, thus assuming some formerly legislative responsibilities. They agreed that administrative decision-makers are subject to demands from citizens as well as higher echelons of government, which results in vague authority patterns. Table 3 presents percentage distributions of these responses.

Table 2. Citizen Participation Objectives

Objectives	Percent of Sample Ranking Item			
	1st Choice	2nd Choice	3rd Choice	Among Top Three Choices
Determine citizen preferences N = 43	38.6	38.6	6.8	84.0
Educate citizens about programs and processes N = 42	26.2	26.2	31.0	83.4
Utilize human resources of citizens N = 32	21.2	15.2	24.2	60.6
Gain support for programs N = 35	2.9	22.9	34.3	60.1
Reduce conflict N = 29	6.9	10.3	20.7	37.9
Fulfill legal requirements N = 26	23.1	7.7	3.8	34.6
Increase power of citizens over programs N = 21	14.3	9.5	9.5	33.3

Table 3. Characteristics of Administrative Citizen Participation

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Missing (Number)
Ambiguity of authority (SCORP planner answers to citizens and supervisors in state government)	18.4	53.1	8.2	12.2	8.2	(0)
Redundancy of function (work of citizens overlaps with work of SCORP planners resulting in duplication of effort)	-	8.2	8.2	59.2	24.5	(0)
Special relationship Citizen participation encourages close relationship between SCORP planners and involved citizens	16.3	59.2	8.2	16.3	-	(0)
Delegate constitutional controls SCORP planners have right to develop selection procedures to determine which citizens to involve in public participation process	17.0	44.7	17.0	14.9	6.4	(2)
Administration vs policy-making SCORP planners should avoid direct participation in the political process	14.6	29.2	10.4	31.3	14.6	(1)
Views of citizen participation						
1. Citizen participation should be limited because SCORP planners have expertise	4.1	14.3	6.1	51.0	24.5	(0)
2. Costs of citizen participation in SCORP planning outweigh benefits	-	12.2	24.5	44.9	18.4	(0)
3. Citizen participation in SCORP planning is impractical	-	4.1	10.2	51.0	34.7	(0)
4. A serious problem in SCORP citizen participation is reaching the average citizen	34.7	49.0	6.1	6.1	4.1	(0)

Another important issue in administrative decision-making is the dividing line between setting policy and administering policy. Especially in public participation policies, this line may blur. Recreation planners were asked whether they should avoid direct participation in the political process; responses were split on this issue.

Four other items examined attitudes of recreation planners toward citizen participation. Most state recreation planners did not share an elitist view of citizen participation. How feasible is citizen participation in recreation planning? Very few planners felt that the costs of citizen participation in recreation planning outweigh the benefits or that public participation is impractical.

Another issue or problem which has emerged in citizen participation conferences is how to increase the involvement of the "average" citizen, the person who is not represented by an organized group. The citizen with a special or vested interest is more easily identified and more likely to volunteer to participate. This issue was addressed in order to determine whether recreation planners perceived it as a serious problem, and a majority agreed that it is a problem of substance.

Conclusions

Several major conclusions may be drawn from this study. One of the purposes of the study was to discover what citizen participation techniques state recreation planners are using. Isolating six basic types of techniques, it was found that the public hearing, key interviews, public information programs and advisory committees were used more often than workshops or surveys. Other evaluative criteria which were used include: participation, representation, effect on policy, and information gained. It appears that citizen participation techniques differ in their appropriateness for a certain size of audience, type of activity, and the kind of audience reached. All the techniques were used as input into the setting of policy and occasionally served as the primary basis for policy. Generally, citizen participation techniques are most useful in identifying problems, but also assist in approving or rejecting aspects of policy.

The selection of planning objectives reveals a great deal about program emphases and values behind them. Recreation planners measure citizen preferences in order to establish state needs and demands. However, they are also concerned about a more informed public. Another common administrative goal is to gain citizen support for programs. Many planners are also anxious to utilize the human resources that citizens represent to supplement staff resources. Notable numbers of respondents were concerned about using citizen participation to reduce conflict and to fulfill legal requirements. These findings seem to support the conclusions of Sewell and Phillips (1979) who identified three conflicting objectives of public participation: high efficiency for the agency versus high degree of involvement by the citizens versus high degree of equity among the public.

The attitudes of state recreation planners toward characteristics of administrative citizen participation were examined. Generally, three of the four characteristics identified by Voth and Bonner (1978) were supported by the planners. Respondents were divided over whether recreation planners should avoid direct participation in the political process.

Planners seemed to feel that citizen participation in recreation planning is a legitimate and worthwhile activity, although they certainly recognize problems. One problem is trying to reach and involve the average citizen, rather than just the citizen with a vested interest.

The stages of planning in which citizen input is most valuable were identified as the generation of ideas and problems and the implementation of a policy plan. Time and cost constraints emerged as the major problems associated with citizen participation in state recreation planning. Other important problems were generating and sustaining public interest, and obtaining input which is representative and includes the average citizen. It seems likely that these problems are common to all administrative citizen participation efforts.

One important finding from this overview of citizen participation in state recreation planning is the great diversity of approaches and programs in existence. Programs seem to reflect characteristics of the state in which they are implemented. Planners recognize the importance of staying in touch with the values and attitudes of the citizens they represent.

It also appears that state recreation planners support the use of citizen participation, but there are varying degrees of commitment to it as a tool for decision-making. A public participation process tends to strain the already limited staff resources of most agencies responsible for the development of state recreation plans. Funds which are used for such programs are then not available for other purposes, such as acquiring land and developing local recreation facilities. However, the increasing emphasis on broad-based citizen participation at the federal level will eventually result in more extensive programs at the state level.

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